DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 296 382 CS 506 206

AUTHOR Corder, Lloyd E.
TITLE Using Expectancy Effects Theory To Analyze the Groups Who Supported Senator McCarthy.
PUB DATE [87]
NOTE 19p.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cognitive Dissonance; Communication Research; Communism; *Political Attitudes; *Political Issues; United States History
IDENTIFIERS Communist Party; *Expectancy Theory; McCarthy (Joseph); Pygmalion Effect; *Radicalism; Self Fulfilling Prophecies; Tension

ABSTRACT

In this essay, Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory (which seeks to explain how individuals try to reconcile holding two inconsistent beliefs at the same time) is used to explore the nature of expectancy effects and what possible roles they play in the thinking of the radical right. The paper first defines expectancy effects and explains how they work by discussing three variables in the expectancy process: senders' disposition, reinforcement, and correspondence bias. The theory of expectancy effects is then used in the paper to examine three of the groups who supported Senator Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s to show that even though the beliefs that each group holds may be false, when each group looks for ways to resolve this tension between beliefs, they create an additional false predisposition. The groups are the pseudo-conservatives (so-called by Richard Hofstadter), certain ethnic groups, and small businessmen. Next, the paper examines how the rest of the expectancy process works with the radical right. The paper concludes that expectancy effects are a useful tool for explaining the implications of the tension reducing strategies described by Festinger. (Twenty notes are included.) (MS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED296382

USING EXPECTANCY EFFECTS THEORY TO ANALYZE THE GROUPS WHO SUPPORTED SENATOR McCARTHY

Lloyd E. Corder

University of Pittsburgh
Department of Communication
1117 Cathedral of Learning
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15260

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Lloyd Corder

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CS506206

INTRODUCTION

Daniel Bell, writing of the psychological make-up of the radical right, states:

> The unwillingness of the radical right to recognize Russian military strength as a prime factor in the balance of terror, and the compulsive preoccupation with a presumed internal treat, can perhaps be clarified by a little-understood psychological mechanism--the need to create "fear-justifying" treats in order to explain fright that is provoked by other reasons. For example, a child who is afraid of the dark may tell his parents that the creaking noises he hears in the house indicate that there are burglars downstairs. It does not reassure the child if he is told that there is no burglar, or that the noises are harmless, for he needs the story to justify the fear he feels. In fact, it upsets the child to the [sic, be] "reassured." (The simplest answer is to tell the child that if there are burglars downstairs, his father is strong enough to handle them or the police are close by.) Similarly, a study by Prasad of rumors in India following an earthquake revealed that people in the areas adjacent to the earthquake, who had heard about the quake but had had no direct experience of it, persisted in believing and spreading rumors that a new earthquake was coming. The function of such stories was to justify, psychologically, the initial apprehensions, which had little basis in experience. In short, the radical right, having a diffused sense of fear, needs to find some story or

> explanation to explain, or justify, that fear. One can deny the external reality, and build up the internal threat, through such psychological mechanisms.[1]

This psychological mechanism that Bell is talking about can be explained using Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory. Essentially, Festinger's "theory seeks to explain how individuals try to reconcile--or, technically, 'to reduce the dissonance' of--holding two inconsistent beliefs at the same time...."[2] For example, a person who smokes is faced with two inconsistent beliefs: first, smoking reduces tension, second, smoking causes cancer. Most of us pride ourselves on being somewhat rational, so there is a tendency to try to "reduce" the tension between this contradiction. How does a smoker go about reducing the tension? One way might be to simply quit smoking. If this occurred, the tension would cease. But the smoker knows that breaking the "habit" is hard, so he might try a second means: he could add new information that will make the two beliefs seem less inconsistent. For example, the smoker might look for cases of people who have smoked all their lives and do not have cancer. He would then say that not everyone gets cancer, and he probably will not get cancer either. If neither of the first two strategies work, the smoker can try to reduce the importance of two beliefs. The smoker might say that the enjoyment that smoking brings is more important than getting cancer. In a similar way, the smoker might also try to

---

[1]Bell, Daniel. The Radical Right. Daniel Bell, ed., Anchor Books, 1963, p. 13-15.
[2]Ibid., footnote, p. 14.

find social support groups, who would help him avoid people who reminded him that smoking was harmful to his health.

When we consider the radical right, Festinger's theory can help us understand how the radical right attempts to reduce the tension between two contradictory beliefs: the United States is a strong and invincible country, but we lost China, Czechoslovakia, and Cuba to the Communists. Paralleling the smoking example above, we can try to reduce tension by 1) changing our beliefs that we are strong and invincible or that we didn't lose China, 2) thinking we were betrayed by subversives in our own government, or 3) thinking that losing China, Czechoslovakia, and Cuba was "no big deal." Clearly, thinking that we had been "sold out" is what the radical right of the fifties and sixties choose to do. But was subversion a "real" threat? Did something else, not spoken, cause the radical right to think this way? Bell states:

> What the right wing is fighting, in the shadow of Communism, is essentially "modernity"--that complex of attitudes that might be defined most simply as the belief in rational assessment, rather than established custom, for the evaluation of social change--and what it seeks to defend is its fading dominance, exercised once through the institutions of small-town America, over the control of social change.[3]

In either case, whether the radical right holds two contradictory beliefs or they are trying to justify their fear, the outcome is

---

[3]Ibid., Bell, p. 16.

the same--they believe that Communists have infested our government.

Granted, Festinger's theory is only one method of explaining one aspect of the McCarthy witch-hunt, but it begins to provide a base for a much more complicated phenomenon that may also be at work in much of the thinking of the radical right: expectancy effects. This is not to say that expectancies do not occur within other political and social groups--quite the contrary. Expectancies are pervasive and have been shown to exist in a number of situations (e.g., the medical field, social science research, animal research, historical research, and so on). However, when the radical right holds two contradictory beliefs--namely, the United States is invincible, but we lost China--the tension must be resolved. When ways of reducing tension are searched for, it seems to me that a deliberate falsification of "reality" is sought out. What I am saying is that the original beliefs can be false, but when tension reducing strategies are searched for, the predisposition becomes "more" false. For example, subversives (if any exist) are thought to be in government and are to blame for our troubles. This position is equally, if not more, false than the original (i.e., we are invincible and we lost China). What seems to be occurring is that when tension is being resolved, new false predispositions about people and situations are created. These false predispositions are the first step of the expectancy process. In this essay, I shall explore the nature of expectancy effects and what possible

roles they play in the thinking of the radical right. To do this, I shall first define expectancy effects and explain how they work. Later, I shall concentrate upon three groups from the radical right that supported McCarthy in the fifties: the pseudo-conservatives, the ethnics (Germans and Irish), and the small businessmen.

WHAT ARE EXPECTANCY EFFECTS?

Expectancy effects have traditionally been labeled as the "pygmalion effect" or "self-fulfilling prophecies." The pygmalion effects occurs when we unconsciously "shape other people's behavior by signaling our expectations."[4] In a similar way, "a self-fulfilling prophecy occurs when a person's expectations of an event makes the outcome more likely to happen than would otherwise have been true."[5] More specifically, Robert Merton states:

> The self-fulfilling prophecy is, in the beginning, a false definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the originally false conception come true. The specious validity of the self-fulfilling prophecy perpetuates a reign of error. For the prophet will cite the actual course of events as proof that he was right from the very beginning.[6]

---

[4]Burgoon, J., Saine, T., The Unspoken Dialogue: An Introduction to Nonverbal Communication. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1978, p. 296.

[5]Adler, R., Rosenfeld, L., Towne, N., Interplay: The Process of Interpersonal Communication, Second Edition. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1983, p. 46-47.

[6]Merton, Robert, Antioch Review, 8, 193, 1948, p. 195.

Although these two terms, pygmalion effect and self-fulfilling prophecy, have different origins, they mean the same thing.

HOW DO EXPECTANCY EFFECTS WORK?

Now that I have define expectancy effects, it is important to analyze how expectancies work. Three variables--senders' disposition, reinforcement, and correspondence bias--all play a role in the expectancy process.

Senders' Predisposition:

Because we find ourselves and others in situations that have prescribed roles, we normally hold predispositions to those situations. Although our predispositions may come from a number of sources, three warrant special attention: stereotypes, hearsay, and past interactions. Stereotypes may come from nonverbal variables. For example, many times attractive individuals are considered more intelligent than unattractive individuals. Stereotypes may also come from cultural ideologies. Robert Jewett, author of the Captain America Complex, argues that many Americans divide the world into the Good Guys (defensive, clean, law-abiding, faithful, and humble) and the Bad Guys (nonhuman, offensive, dirty, lawless, intransigent, and arrogant).[7] Examining several of Nixon's Presidential addresses,[8] Jewett finds that these stereotypes do exist:

---

[7]Jewett, Robert. The Captain America Complex: The Dilemma of Zealous Nationalism. The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, Pa., 1973, pp. 150-154.

[8]Presidential addresses printed in the Des Moines Register on April 22, 1970; May 2, 1970; April 28, 1972; and May 10, 1972.

> The Good Guys and the Bad Guys provided the appeal in the speeches defending the Indochina war, especially in the years 1968-1972. ...the North Vietnamese were "international outlaws," involved in "aggression across an international border," using dirty tactics like "indiscriminate shelling" of "civilian population centers," violating "the treaties they had signed in 1954," demonstrating the spirit of "intransigence," and making "arrogant" demands. The Good guys in those speeches were equally gratifying. Our side seeks only to "win the kind of peace that will last," engaging in bombing for the sake of "protective reaction," offering the fairest and "most generous peace terms," respecting "scrupulously" the neutrality of Cambodia and Laos, and holding firm to faithful "resolve" while engaged in a "selfless cause."[9]

In addition to stereotypes, the second source of a sender's predisposition may come from hearsay or what the sender has heard about a person or situation (e.g., I heard that he was a nice guy). Finally, past interactions may influence the sender's predisposition. For example, if someone was particularly friendly on a first meeting, we might expect them to behave the same during a second meeting, therefore, fulfilling our expectations.

---

[9]Ibid., Jewett, pp. 157-158.

Reinforcement:

Once the sender has a predisposition to a particular person or event, the sender will begin to look for cues or reinforcement to confirm his or her expectancy. It is my belief that once an event has happened (and sometimes before the event is completed) the prediction may be reinforced in some way. For example, if two people are talking and one expects the other to be friendly, the first person might smile and give pleasant nonverbal expressions to the receiver. The receiver, in turn, would recognize these signals and react accordingly by returning friendly gestures. Although these reinforcement cues can be verbal, many seem to be nonverbal and signaled below the sender's awareness. Burgoon and Saine sum up the behaviors in the following way:

> Smiles, nods, increased eye contact, forward body lean, pats, hugs, and approving vocal cues may act as positive reinforcement; frowns, threatening looks and gestures, neutral facial expressions, reduced eye contact, hostile or cold vocal cues, and silence may act as [punishment].[10]

Correspondence Bias:

Once a sender's predisposition is confirmed, one final step, correspondence bias, remains. Jones states:

> [Correspondence bias] is a tendency to assume that a given action can be explained by reference to a correspondent disposition when actually people with a variety of different dispositions would have behaved in a similar way. This

---

[10]Ibid., Burgoon and Saine, p. 279.

> tendency toward correspondence bias means that we fail to take fully into account the controlling role that situations play. Thus, persons expressing opinions under extremely constraining circumstances (for example, as role-players in an experiment where the experimenter clearly assigns the position they must espouse) are nevertheless seen to be sympathetic to those opinions.[11]

In other words, Jones is suggesting that even though the receiver of a message may be following a prescribed role, the sender assumes that the receiver's behavior is confirming his or her expectancy.

EXPECTANCY EFFECTS APPLIED TO THE SUPPORTERS OF MCCARTHY: PREDISPOSITIONS

Now that I have defined expectancy effects and suggested how they work, I shall attempt to use the theory to examine three of the the groups who supported McCarthy in the fifties. For each group, I shall provide a brief description and show how each group's predisposition is similar. I want to show that even though the beliefs that each group holds (in accordance to Festinger's theory) may be false, when each group looks for ways to resolve this tension between beliefs, they create an additional false predisposition. As I stated earlier, this new predisposition is the first step in the expectancy process. Once

---

[11]Jones, Edward. "Interpreting Interpersonal Behavior: The Effects of Expectancies," Science, 1986, 234, p. 44.

it has been established as being false, we can turn and look for reinforcement and correspondence bias.

The Pseudo-Conservatives:

One group that supported McCarthy was a strange brand of "loyalists" known as the pseudo-conservatives, a term coined by Richard Hofstadter. When we look closely to see what type of a person would belong to this group, Hofstadter states:

> It is impossible to identify him by class, for the pseudo-conservative impulse can be found in practically all classes in society, although its power probably rests largely upon its appeal to the less educated members of the middle classes. The ideology of pseudo-conservatism can be characterized but not defined, because the pseudo-conservative tends to be more than ordinarily incoherent about politics... Many of the most zealous followers of Senator McCarthy are pseudo-conservative.[12]

From the outset, it seems like the pseudo-conservative, because he is "ordinarily incoherent about politics" can hold two or more contradictory beliefs as described by Festinger. When we look for evidence of the pseudo-conservative's predisposition to his world, Hofstadter has this to offer:

> He believes himself to be living in a world in which he is spied upon, plotted against, betrayed, and very likely destined for total ruin. He feels that his liberties have

---

[12]Hofstadter, Richard. "The Pseudo-Conservative Revolt (1955)," in Bell, p. 77-78.

> been arbitrarily and outrageously invaded. He is opposed to almost everything that has happened in American politics for the past twenty years ... He sees his own country as being so weak that it is constantly about to fall victim to subversion; and yet he feels that it is so all-powerful that any failure it may experience in getting its way in the world--for instance, in the Orient--cannot possibly be due to is limitations but must be attributed to its having been betrayed.[13]

Thinking that the United States has been betrayed was a tension reducing move, but it also created a false predisposition. It would seem, at least for now, that the pseudo-conservatives have met the first step of the expectancy process. Let us now turn to the other groups who supported McCarthy and see if they also meet the requirements of this first step.

Ethnics:

The second group who supported McCarthy was "the rising middle-class strata of the ethnic groups, the Irish and the Germans, who sought to prove their Americanism, the Germans particularly because of the implied taint of disloyalty during World War II."[14] Hofstadter maintains that these ethnics, at times, were a subgroup of the pseudo-conservatives. Apparently, there was some underlying fear that since these immigrants came from another country they could not be trusted. In addition, the

---

[13]Ibid., p. 78.
[14]Ibid., Bell, p. 58.

immigrants were not born here, so a question remains as to whether they were "really and truly and fully American."[15]

Regardless, the variable of status also seems to be tied up with the ethnics. Those who came from a harder life can have a better life here in the United States. Particularly, Hofstadter suggests that immigrants turn pseudo-conservative when they are gaining status.[16] Why is this the case? Hofstadter goes on to suggest that:

> There is a close relation between social mobility and ethnic prejudice. Persons moving downward, and even upward under many circumstances, in the social scale tend to show greater prejudice against such ethnic minorities as the Jews and Negroes than commonly prevails in the social strata they have left or are entering... I believe that the typical prejudiced person and the typical pseudo-conservative dissenter are usually the same person, that the mechanisms at work in both complexes are quite the same, and that it is merely the expediencies and the strategy of the situation today that cause groups that once stressed racial discrimination to find other scapegoats.[17]

Whenever an immigrant is trying to prove that he is an American or whenever that immigrant is changing social classes, it seems that he is prone to scapegoating--probably because he wants to justify his new position. Further, it seems to me that if someone is

---

[15]Ibid., Hofstadter, p. 90.
[16]Ibid., Hofstadter, p. 86.
[17]Ibid., Hofstadter, p. 91.

prone to scapegoat, that comes from a false predisposition about the true existence of people and events. It would seem, then, that the ethnics also fulfilled the first requirement of the expectancy process.

Small Businessmen:

The third group who supported McCarthy was a "mass counterpart" of the "newly wealthy individuals": the "small independent businessmen."[18] The reasons are not clear why these individuals supported McCarthy, but Lipset suggests:

> These small businessmen, perhaps more than any other group, have felt constrained by progressive social legislation and the rise of labor unions. They are squeezed harder than large business, since their competitive position does not allow them to pay increases in wages as readily as can big firms. Governmental measures such as social security, business taxes, or various regulations which require filling out forms, all tend to complicate the operation of small business. In general, these people are oriented upwards, wish to become larger businessmen, and take on the values of those who are more successful, or perhaps more accurately, they tend to take over their image of the values of more powerful groups, values which are often those of the radical right.[19]

---

[18]Lipset, Martin. In Bell, p. 341.
[19]Ibid., p. 342.

Lipset seems to be arguing that not only do the small businessmen strive to be like their more wealthy counter parts (such as the Texas oil men), they also seems to be like the immigrants who are changing status, as they become wealthier. If this is the case, then the small businessmen are also prone to scapegoating. Therefore, they also fulfill the first requirement of the expectancy process.

EXPECTANCY EFFECTS APPLIED TO THE SUPPORTERS OF MCCARTHY: REINFORCEMENT AND CORRESPONDENCE BIAS

Now that I have describe three of the groups who supported McCarthy and suggested how they each have a similar, yet false, predisposition to their world, I shall attempt to explain how the rest of the expectancy process works with the radical right. Remember that if someone holds a false predisposition about some person or some event, the sender of a message will naturally look for reinforcement. In the case of these three groups, it was thought that there were subversives in the government. This, as shown above, was the false predisposition with its roots in scapegoating. If you think subversives exist, and you look long and hard enough, eventually you will probably find someone who at least acts like they are subversive (whether they are indeed subversive is debatable). Therefore, the members of these groups could have easily gone around accusing friends and co-workers of being Communist. If someone was consistently late or went to strange places on their lunch hour, it could have been used as evidence of subversiveness. Of course, the last step in the

expectancy process is to suggest that the subversive acted independently and on his own. In other words, the radical right, in this case, would say that the subversive had not been confined by rules of behavior, regardless of the situation. Our example would continue and be completed when we thought that the subversive had gone to the wrong place for lunch, not because his wife wanted to meet him there, but because he had a meeting with his Communist counterparts.

In order to show a more concrete example of the expectancy process, we must turn to the actual witch-hunters themselves, not the supporters of the witch-hunters. Some have argued that McCarthy really did not know what or who a Communist was, but he did think that there were subversives in the government and sought to "get them out." Clearly, he had a predisposition to scapegoating and sought to reinforce this originally false position. Newman, showing a case where this predisposition was taken to its extremes and quoting Norman Biltz, states:

> Senator McCarran believed completely that there was one being in the United States who directed the operation of the Communist Party. He was completely convinced of this, and so was McCarthy. Patsy told me many, many times, he said, "Norm, I can't get through the cloud. I can't find that person. But I feel his influence all over Washington." And he said, "If I throw up a hundred false balloons, if I make a hundred efforts that fail, if I make a hundred mistakes, and do eventually find that one man, I will have served my

country well." And he died believing it. I wouldn't dare tell you some of the people he suspected.[20]

Although Owen Lattimore was thought by some to be this "one being," the accusations were never substantiated. As hard as McCarthy and his supporters tried to find reinforcement for their beliefs, next to none could be had.

If someone could have proven that Lattimore was a Communist and supplying secrets to the Russians, then, perhaps, the last step of the expectancy process would have been completed. Several possibilities exist and need to be examined separately. First, If Lattimore was shown to be a communist and he was indeed one, then we would not have a self-fulfilling prophecy. We would only have an accurate prediction of his character. Second, if Lattimore was shown to be a communist and he was not, then, even though this is an injustice, the process would still not be an expectancy effect. Third, a true expectancy effect would result when, and only when, Lattimore, after being accused of supplying secrets to the Soviets, decided to go ahead and supply them anyway. In this third case, the originally false predisposition of McCarthy would have caused a "real" change in the behavior of Lattimore.

IMPLICATIONS

From this analysis, it is clear that expectancy effects are a useful tool for explaining the implications of the tension reducing strategies that are described by Festinger. Although

---

[20]Newman, Robert. "The Lingering Poison of McCarranism," The Carolinas Speech Communication Annual, Vol. 1, 1985, p. 53.

actual self-fulfilling prophecies are hard to find in the thinking of the radical right, we can see, using the steps of the expectancy effect, that it is natural to look for support for the originally false predisposition. At the same time, however, I have also pointed out that true expectancy effects do not seem to have happened in regard to McCarthy and the witch-hunt. My guess as to why they never found any subversives is that there just were not any--at least not of the caliber that they expected. It is like reading a ghost story. Once you read and think about it, everything is frightening for a while. And if Bell is correct in his observations, much of the radical right of McCarthy's time were reacting to deep seated fears they possessed. The radical right is a strange lot. On one hand, I laugh at what they say--their statements are so contradictory. On the other hand, I pity them--it seems sad that a group feels this badly about themselves that they need to go to such extremes to justify their fears. What is most frightening is suspecting that they could cause a harmful expectancy effect by their sheer determination to prove a false predisposition.